

Dong Son Culture in First Ten Centuries AD

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Abstract: Dong Son culture is the solid source and foundation of Dong Son vitality with abundant resources both in terms of the material and spiritual aspects. Archaeological documentation has proven that, after over 1,000 years of Northern (i.e. Chinese feudal states') domination, the vitality of the culture did overcome the fierce challenges of history. Moreover, it also enriched its own resources, making use of the quintessence of the Chinese culture, and went on with incessant development.

Keywords: Dong Son Culture, Dong Son bronze drum, Northern domination.

1. Introduction

The period of the first ten centuries AD is referred to by researchers as the period of *Bắc thuộc* (lit.: belonging to the North, i.e. being under the domination of the country in the North, meaning Chinese feudal states). In fact, the period of *Bắc thuộc* started nearly two centuries earlier. In 179 BC, the land of Au Lac (Vietnamese: *Âu Lạc*) Kingdom was annexed into Nanyue (南越, Vietnamese: *Nam Việt*) by Zhao Tuo (趙佗, Vietnamese: *Triệu Đà*), after he conquered the kingdom. Since then, Vietnam has been dominated by the Chinese feudal emperors over various dynasties, including the Western Han (西漢), the Eastern Han (東漢), the Liu Chao (六朝 – Six Dynasties), the Sui-Tang (隋唐), until 938, when its people led by Ngo Quyen won the historic victory in the Battle of Bach Dang River.

During the period of over 1000 years, Viet people enduringly carried out struggles against the ruling yoke of the feudal dynasties from China in all aspects, including the struggles for national independence and for the protection and development of its culture.

Based on archaeological materials, typically some types of relics/sites such as those of habitation, burials, ceramic kilns, and especially archaeological artefacts such as bronze drums, bronze and ceramic stuffs, the authors analyse the long-lasting vitality of Dong Son culture and its great impacts in the Vietnamese history and culture.

2. Dong Son Culture as shown in types of relics/sites

Relics/sites of habitation, burials and ceramic production centres are the fundamental types of relics/sites in the period.

2.1. *Sites of habitation*

Very few materials on habitation sites dating back to the period of the domination still remain nowadays. However, our understanding of the life of ancient Viet people during the period has been complemented by archaeological findings in the land of the ancient Dong Dau and Luy Lau area (Bac Ninh province).

2.1.1. Site of Dong Dau field

Dong Dau (Vietnamese: *Đồng Dâu*) field lies on the alluvial plain of Dau River within the area of Tri Qua commune, Thuan Thanh district, Bac Ninh province. The ancient town named Luy Lau was located across the river. In 1986, an excavation conducted in the area provided a lot of significant findings with thousands of ceramic artefacts such as household containers and cooking utensils (pots and jars), eating and drinking gadgets (bowls and plates), ceramic production tools (763 sinkers), and other iron, bronze and bony tools. The date of the site is determined to range from the late 2nd to the 7th century AD.

According to the research on the cultural layers and artefacts, the excavators suppose that Dong Dau was a site of habitation of fishermen - the locals earned their living by fishing. The site of Dong Dau shows simple-mannered life of ancient Viet people during the one-thousand-year period of the domination. And, after studying the rough grey and rope-patterned ceramic artefacts from the site, we have realised the existence and development of traditional ceramics in the proto-history of Vietnam [20, pp.251-253].

2.1.2. Habitation site in Luy Lau Town

Luy Lau (Vietnamese: *Luy Lâu* - 羸婁) used to be a ruling headquarter of the Han occupants in Giao Chi (Vietnamese: *Giao Chi*) as well as an ancient Buddhist centre during the period of domination.

For a long time, it was firmly believed that inside the walls of Luy Lau were mansions, offices and houses of the Chinese feudal mandarins. Recent archaeological research findings, however, have provided us with new understanding.

By the end of 2014, eight excavations had been carried out in the site of the ancient Luy Lau citadel. Consequently, a lot of new and valuable materials related to the history and the citadel were unearthed, which tell us that Luy Lau citadel is a complex with various types of sites and artefacts dating from different periods.

Luy Lau citadel was first built in the beginning of the first century and, since then, it had been continuously used and repaired till the 10th century. The research on the architectural materials on this site shows that Luy Lau citadel experienced large-scale construction twice, under the Eastern Han dynasty and the Liu Chao (Six Dynasties), and during the period of the Sui - Tang dynasties. It had a large size with a strong and advantageous structure. It is highly probable that the citadel consisted of three, or even more, ramparts, not just two as we previously thought.

The test excavations outside the citadel, next to the foundation of the southern rampart provided us with a lot of artefacts such as bricks, tiles, ceramics, bronze coins, and animal bones, etc. The artefacts

are of the same date as that of the citadel. It is an area where houses and streets were built on a large scale with busy production and trading activities along Dau River.

Nearly one thousand pieces of casting moulds of Dong Son bronze drums have been unearthed so far. Most of them were found in the cultural layer.

An excavation was conducted by the Vietnam National Museum of History in the inner citadel in late 2014, owing to which thousands of valuable artefacts were found. Remarkably, there were a wide range of utensils such as bowls, jars, pots, vessels, ink slabs, etc. made of glazed pottery and terracotta, showing a site of habitation, where both mandarins, intellectuals and grassroots lived together over many periods, including the times of Eastern Han and the Liu Chao. The traces of a metal-making workshop were discovered with a large number of lead sinkers and spinning-plumbs, revealing that local people did both fishing and weaving.

The above-mentioned materials demonstrate that there were residential areas of commoners inside the ancient Luy Lau citadel. Comparing the artefacts with those found in Dong Dau field in 1986, archaeologists saw that they are not much different from one another. Interestingly, based on the artefacts, the researchers who carried out the excavation in 1986 arrived at the conclusion that the lifestyle of people in Dong Dau field was typical for that of Viet people, and contrary to the Han-, or Chinese-, style among those residing inside the citadel. Yet, the excavation conducted inside the citadel revealed that there was hardly any difference in the

lifestyles of dwellers outside and inside the citadel. This illustrates the presence of numerous local (Vietnamese) people inside Luy Lau citadel, who practised the ancient Vietnamese lifestyle and constituted the major resource for the existence of the citadel [2].

The evidence of the habitation (and the casting moulds of bronze drums) of ancient Viet people in Luy Lau citadel demonstrates the great vitality of the Vietnamese culture in the very dwelling place of the Han - Tang invaders.

2.2. *Burials*

There were two types of burials practised in the first ten centuries AD. One is the boat grave (or the tree-trunk coffins), and the other is the brick grave (or the Han - style grave).

2.2.1. Boat graves

It is also named the tree-trunk coffin. Archaeologists have a relatively broad consensus that the boat grave was initially practised in the heyday of Dong Son culture (from the 5th to the 3rd century BC) and the authors of this type of burial were ancient Viet people. The boat grave is considered an important cultural element of Dong Son people, especially those who lived in the lowland of the Red River Delta. The area, where this burial type was practised, is narrower than the area of Dong Son culture. By now, the sites of Dong Son boat graves have been found in 8 cities/provinces in northern Vietnam.

Concerning the date of boat graves, most researchers suppose that this type of burial appeared in Vietnam in the 5th and 4th centuries BC. There are, however, different opinions about its ending. Some researchers assume that this type of burial was finished in the 13th and 14th centuries [16, pp.49-56] or under the Tran dynasty and the Later Le dynasty early period. Meanwhile, others assume that it was continually practised until now [17, pp.77-90], [5].

Bui Van Liem wrote that there were two periods of the boat graves in Vietnam: The first was at the same time with the development of Dong Son culture (i.e. from the 5th and 4th centuries BC to the 1st and the 2nd centuries AD); thus, it is the period of Dong Son boat graves. The second period lasted from the 3rd and the 4th centuries up to now. Additionally, Mr. Liem noted that the boat graves in the second period should be named in line with the function and conception of the owners so as to differentiate them from the boat graves in the period of Dong Son culture [11, p.184]. We agree with him and suggest naming the boat graves in the second period "*the boat graves of the Dong Son tradition*".

The materials of the boat graves have made important contributions to demonstrating the vitality of Dong Son culture over the ups and downs in Vietnam's history. Some typical examples can be cited as follows:

In around one or two centuries BC and AD, the grave goods are mainly artefacts typical of Dong Son culture, e.g. those in

the sites of Viet Khe, Chau Can, Chau Son, Vu Xa, Nguyet Ang, Dong Quan, Dong Lang, Thang Loi, Phuong Dong and Kiet Thuong, etc. In the grave site in Viet Khe (Thuy Nguyen district, Hai Phong city), five boat-shaped graves were found, of which the biggest one contained over 100 artefacts. Most of the artefacts are typical bronze objects of Dong Son culture, such as drums, jars, axes and daggers; and, some of them were exotic and considered to have been brought to the place as a result of exchange.

Traces of the Viet - Han cultural contacts are shown quite clearly by materials found in the graves in Phu Luong, Xuan La, Doi Son, Nghia Vu, Cua Dinh, Tu Lac, An Thi, Minh Duc and Tram Long, etc. In the grave site in Xuan La (Graves No.3 and No.4) were found typical artefacts of the late Dong Son culture such as bronze jars, lances, axes and plates as well as a lot of iron tools and 43 coins dating back to the period of the Eastern Han dynasty. In the site in An Thi, archaeologists unearthed 200 coins, most of which are Wu Zhu coins from the dynasty. In the site in Phu Luong, found were bronze kettles of the Eastern Han style. Many of such artefacts were also unearthed during the excavations conducted in the lowland of the Red River Delta.

In the site in Chau Can and the ancient graves by To Lich River (Hanoi), the dead are Lac Viet (Vietnamese: *Lạc Việt*) people who chewed betel and had blackened teeth. Inside a boat-shaped grave in An Khe (Quynh Phu district, Thai Binh province) was a woman, whose teeth were blackened

as per the tradition. The grave is determined to date from the time of the Liu Chao in the 5th and 6th centuries [14, pp.27-33]. The custom of teeth-blackening prevailed in the period of Hung (Vietnamese: *Hùng*) Kings and was maintained throughout the history.

From the time of the Eastern Han dynasty, brick graves started to appear in the land of the former Au Lac. Yet, the exotic burial practice of the brick graves was under major influence by the culture of boat graves. Inside the Han-style brick graves in Nghia Vu (Hai Duong province) and Duong Du (Vietnamese: *Đường Dù* – Hai Phong city), there are boat-shaped coffins of Dong Son style. This demonstrates the great vitality and sustainability of the local culture, including the Dong Son culture, in the period of the domination.

The above-mentioned results of research and excavations show that the time of the Eastern Han dynasty is the beginning of the Viet- Han acculturation and cultural exchange in the land of the former Au Lac.

After the 10th century, the Han-style brick graves disappeared completely. Instead, there were Viet-style graves with considerable changes in the grave structure, coffins and burial custom as well. Nonetheless, we can find traces of the traditional boat graves during the centuries of Dai Viet (Vietnamese: *Đại Việt*, or Great Viet); for example, the tree-trunk coffin discovered in the Dinh and Le dynasties' vestige complex in Truong Yen commune (Ninh Binh province), with coins of Kai Yuan Tong Bao (*Khai*

Nguyên Thông Bảo) and Qing Yuan Tong Bao (*Khánh Nguyên Thông Bảo*) put inside. The grave is determined to date from the Ly and Tran dynasties. Such tree-trunk coffins have been also found in other graves dating back to the Tran dynasty such as the graves in Tan Dinh (Thach Ha district, Ha Tinh province), Quang Hop (Quang Xuong district, Thanh Hoa province) and Thang Binh (Nong Cong district, Thanh Hoa province). This shows that under the Tran dynasty the technique for making boat-coffins handed down from the Dong Son boat-grave tradition was still maintained.

2.2.2. Brick graves

From the Eastern Han dynasty to the Tang dynasty (the 3rd – the 9th centuries), in addition to the boat and earthen graves, there appeared brick graves, which were typical for the Han culture. So far, hundreds of brick graves have been found and studied. They are distributed in a vast area in the lowland and the midland of Northern and North Central Vietnam. The graves are densely located in 4 provinces, namely Thanh Hoa, Quang Ninh, Bac Ninh and Bac Giang. Most of the brick graves are found in northern Vietnam, near former administrative and ruling centres or along the arteries of the times. In the northern mountainous areas, very few of them have been discovered; they are found in only the provinces of Cao Bang, Son La, Lao Cai and Yen Bai.

The brick graves dating back to the period from the Eastern Han to the Liu Chao (from the 3rd to the 6th century)

account for the biggest proportion. In the later period of the Tang dynasty (the 9th century), there were fewer and fewer such graves, which were then gradually disappearing with no traces left by now.

In the first centuries AD, the bricks used to build graves often had patterns on the sides. Apart from the common Han-style patterns such as single lozenges, interlocking lozenges, square and fishbone shapes, we can see the patterns of Dong Son culture such as tangent circles, dotted concentric circles and cartouches, etc. When excavating a brick grave in Duc Son (Dong Trieu district, Quang Ninh province) dating back to the period of the Eastern Han dynasty, for example, researchers saw that the patterns on the bricks used to build the grave were very similar to those on Dong Son bronze drums, which were twisted S-letters and cartouches [9, pp.56-73]. The same phenomenon can be seen in many other graves such as those in Mao Khe (Quang Ninh province), Vung Dong and Nghi Ve (Thanh Hoa province), Thuan Thanh and Lang Ngam (Bac Ninh province), Duong Du and Trang Kenh (Hai Phong city), Chem and Dong Van (Hanoi).

Most of the Han-style brick graves have been destroyed or illegally dug. Buried together with the dead in the graves were daily living utensils such as bowls, plates, cups, personal ornaments and even replicas of houses and water wells. Those artefacts often bear the Han style, but did exist also quite many bearing the style of Dong Son culture. They include Dong Son ceramic jars found in the site in Ham Rong (Thanh

Hoa province), where a lot of Dong Son-style artefacts were found, e.g. lances, bronze pans, bronze pots, and *chõ xôi* (type of pot to steam sticky rice). In the grave site in Mao Khe (Quang Ninh province), a Dong Son-style lamp was found; and, in the site in Nguyet Duc (Bac Ninh province) archaeologists discovered an earthen well of the type popular in the northern Vietnamese plain (the Red River Delta) [19, pp.254-269]. In Lach Truong (Thanh Hoa province), apart from Han-style artefacts, found was an earthen tray decorated with the pattern of three toads huddling their heads towards one another, which was of the Han style, surrounded by a tangent circle, which was of the Dong Son style. In the grave site dating back to the late Eastern Han dynasty in Da Bac (Van Don district, Quang Ninh province), apart from a large number of Han-style grave goods, excavators have also found a drum basin, the bottom of which is decorated with patterns quite similar to those on Huu Chung bronze drums. The fact that the bronze trays found in the grave are decorated with the traditional patterns on Dong Son bronze drums shows the first signals of the fact that those [foreigners] who aimed to assimilate the Vietnamese culture got themselves assimilated [13, p.110].

By now, really few materials are available on the brick graves dating back to the Liu Chao period (from the 3rd to the 6th century), but the recent findings from an ancient grave in Bi Thuong (Quang Ninh province) have somewhat provided us with more understanding of the vitality of Dong Son culture. In the site in Bi

Thuong, archaeologists discovered a lot of artefacts, including coarse ceramics, glazed potteries and metal objects, which are mostly worshipping utensils and those for the daily life. Remarkably, the set of coarse ceramics shows shapes and patterns relatively similar to the traditional characteristics of Dong Son ceramics [12, pp.417-420].

Of the few brick graves dating back to the Sui and Tang period (from the 7th to the 8th century), we can find the stamps of Dong Son culture. The excavation in the grave site in Cua Den (Vietnamese: *Cửa Đền*, lit. Temple Gate; Dong Anh district, Hanoi) provided us with abundant artefacts, including those of ceramics, crockery, terracotta and other metal objects. What is noteworthy is that, of the 100 pieces of coarse Dong Son-style ceramics, 47 were found inside the grave, and 53 - found outside, together with a Co Loa bronze arrow. The date of the grave is determined to range from the 8th to the 9th century and the grave owner is probably a Viet noble who had a high rank in the society [18, pp.360-364].

2.3. Ceramics production centres

The Dong Son traditional ceramics production existed and was developed in the context of Vietnam being under Chinese dynasties' occupation. Given the impacts by the northern neighbour's socio-political conditions and the influence by its advanced ceramic technique, changes were made into Vietnam's traditional ceramic production. To further understand this, we should conduct research on archaeological

facts regarding the major ceramics production centres.

During the first centuries AD, many ceramic production centres were established in the land of Giao Chi and Cuu Chan (Vietnamese: *Cửu Chân*, Chinese: Jiuzhen). Hundreds of materials have so far been found in the ceramic kilns dating back to the period of the domination. Among the ten areas of ceramic kilns in the first ten centuries, the most outstanding are the three provinces of Thanh Hoa, with Tam Tho ceramic production centre, Bac Ninh, with Dai Lai, Bai Dinh, Tam Son, Thanh Lang and Duong Xa centres, and Vinh Phuc, with Dong Dau and Thanh Lang centres. With regards to the dates, the centre in Tam Tho (Thanh Hoa) is the most ancient, established in the late 1st century and existed till the 4th or the 5th century. Other centres were generally set up during the Liu Chao period. The establishment of the ceramics production centres revealed the contacts and exchanges with the Chinese culture. There emerged, consequently, significant changes in the ceramics production and ceramic products of Vietnam.

Following are the prominent characteristics of the above-mentioned ceramics production centres as:

The majority of the ceramic kilns were distributed in the areas where ancient Viet people lived from the Iron Age. Early ceramic kilns such as those in Tam Tho, Dai Lai, Tam Son and Thanh Lang were built near the sites of Dong Son culture. This characteristic is formed by two factors that, first, the densely-populated areas were the good market for consumption of ceramic products; second,

at the times of Dong Son culture, there were no craft villages specialised in ceramic production; thus, skilled ceramic workers who lived in the ancient Viet villages undertook the handicrafts while also working as farmers. They constituted the abundant human resource taking part in the production activities in Han people's ceramic kilns.

While working, Vietnamese ceramic workers learned the kiln-making techniques, for dumpling-shaped, dragon-shaped and toad-shaped... kilns, as well as many skills from Chinese ceramic producers. They also adopted the Chinese model of organising the production. Ceramic workers in Giao Chi and Cuu Chan made their own products meeting the demands in the society, based on such accumulated experiences. Yet, they did not forget to attach the spirit of the Vietnamese ceramic style to the products in terms of both the shapes and the decorative patterns. Production of traditional Dong Son-style ceramics was thus still maintained for centuries.

A number of ceramic kilns were located near urban areas and district administrative centres. The ceramic kilns in Tam Tho were built near the centre of Cuu Chan district, while the kilns in Bai Dinh were built next to Luy Lau citadel, an important ruling headquarter in the periods of the Han and Tang dynasties. The kilns in Dong Dau and Thanh Lang were built near the administrative centre of Me Linh district. Those kilns were built to meet the demand for construction of fortifications, mansions, houses and for the consumption

of both the upper-class Han people and the local commoners.

The existence of the ceramics production centres and their products supports the view that many ceramic products of non-native, or exotic, style were made in Vietnam. The use of Dong Son ceramics as grave goods in the brick graves and the existence of Dong Son decorative patterns as well as the appearance of tubular kilns demonstrate that there were also Viet ceramic kilns (with Viet ceramic workers) besides Chinese ceramic kilns during the time.

Since the ceramic kilns were built in proximity to the rural market and the wet-rice growing agriculture, the occupation was obtaining more and more characteristics of the folklore. The trend is shown by the diversification of ceramic materials and products and the continuation of the Dong Son style. The kilns were built in line with the local natural conditions. People tried to take full advantage of the conditions such as the local hills and mounds, the waterways, and the materials available. The production custom was originated from the characteristics of Vietnam's natural conditions, and the ancient Viet people's habits of dwelling. It is the very living space, to which Dong Son culture of ancient Viet people had been adapted for a long time.

Ceramics production in the above-mentioned centres made active contributions towards the anti-assimilation or de-sinicisation throughout the first ten centuries AD, setting up a foundation for the development of the well-known Dai Viet ceramics afterwards.

3. Dong Son culture as shown by types of artefacts

3.1. Bronze drums

3.1.1. Existence of Dong Son bronze drums

In 43 AD, the insurrection led by the Trung sisters (Hai Bà Trưng) was defeated by the cruel repression from the Eastern Han dynasty. It was the time Dong Son culture, the symbol of which was the Dong Son bronze drum (Heger Type I), encountered the risk of being completely annihilated due to the Han scheme for destroying Viet culture to the every root. The Han commander Ma Yuan implemented the policy of collecting all bronze drums to cast bronze horses and copper pillars, aiming at making Lac Viet people to forget Dong Son bronze drums and their own origin. Despite all the dark schemes of the invaders, however, ancient Viet people continued casting and using the bronze drums.

According to archaeological materials, Dong Son bronze drums were cast even in the very place of the invaders from the North, which was Luy Lau citadel, during the 4th and 5th centuries. In November 1998, Nishimura, a Japanese archaeologist, found a fragment of the mould for casting Dong Son drums in the northern area of Luy Lau citadel. Excavations were conducted by archaeologists of the Vietnam National Museum of History in 2014 and 2015, unearthing nearly 1,000 fragments of the terracotta moulds for drum-casting, including external and internal moulds for

casting various parts of the drum such as the tympan and the mantle. Fragments of the external moulds are often decorated with typical patterns of Dong Son drums such as tangent circles, concentric circles, comb-teeth and rice grain patterns. Fragments of the external moulds are often red or light red; whereas those of the internal ones are greyish-white and solid. Apart from the fragments of drum-casting moulds, other artefacts related to the drum-casting process were also found; for example, axles of the turning table and funnels for pouring liquid bronze. Importantly, those fragments of the moulds were discovered in the cultural layer determined to date back to the 4th century AD [1].

The above-mentioned findings are extremely significant to show the great vitality of Dong Son culture, even when Giao Chi was under the control and domination of the Chinese feudal dynasties. Eventually, the latter failed to assimilate Vietnam's national culture.

3.1.2. Bronze drums of Heger Type II: the continuity of Dong Son traditional drums

The research findings of many archaeologists show that the emergence of the second-type drums (by the Heger classification) was the continuity and inheritance of Dong Son drums. The Heger Type II drums were made and developed in the context of the gradual decline of the Heger Type I ones [10, p.179]. Many scholars name the drums of this type Muong drums, since they are found most in the areas of Muong ethnic people.

The inheritance is shown in the casting technique of the Type II drums; for example, spacers were placed between the internal and external moulds to fix the positions so that melted bronze could not break the moulds. This demonstrates that those who cast Dong Son drums were the very people who cast the Type II drums.

It is easy to realise the inheritance shown by the patterns used to decorate Dong Son drums and early Type II drums. We can find the Dong Son patterns of stylised feathered men and geometric lines on the latter.

Noticeably, many of the Type II drums are more or less influenced by the Han patterns, specifically the patterns of single and inter-locking lozenges. The patterns are found quite often on the bronze drums and the Han-style brick graves as well. This shows clearly the Sino-Vietnamese cultural exchange [8, pp.53-59].

The Type II drums were developed vigorously from the period of the domination to the Ly and Tran dynasties. Many of the patterns on the drums bear the stamps of the patterns in the stones and ceramics under the two dynasties, such as the sinusoid dragon-shaped and the phoenix-shaped patterns. On the tympan of the bronze drum found in Ram hamlet (Ky Son district, Hoa Binh province), the layout consists of lotus petal patterns, which is quite similar to the layout of patterns on the stone pedestal in Phat Tich pagoda (Bac Ninh province).

Under the Later Le dynasty, the patterns in stones and ceramics laid major influence on the patterns on the Type II drums. For example, a lot of Buddhism-

related patterns, such as the shape of a bodhi leaf or a lotus petal, were arranged symmetrically along the strips of patterns around the drum mantle, like the patterns on the ceramic lamp base under the Le and Mac dynasties.

In addition to the Type II drums made and developed throughout the period of the domination, Viet people created drums of other types during the time of independence under Vietnamese monarchs. They included Canh Thinh bronze drums cast in 1800 under the Tay Son dynasty. The drums looked relatively beautiful. Unlike the traditional bronze drums, their bodies are not divided into three parts. They are cylindrical instead. One can see the influence on Canh Thinh drums, however, by the drums of other types, such as the pattern of a bodhi leaf from the Type II drums and the *nhũ đĩnh* (patterns of round dots made in relief) from the Type IV drums.

3.1.3. Bronze drums in the spiritual life of Viet people

For Vietnamese people, the bronze drum is considered a companion on the course of history, and its spirit and soul have been kept deep in their spiritual life for generations. The bronze drum was personified by Viet people as the embodiment of a sacred deity to be worshipped at communal houses, temples and pagodas. In Vietnam, the custom of bronze drum worship was practised since very early in history. As recorded in historical documents, King Dinh Tien Hoang paid a lot of attention to giving bronze drums to localities for worship.

Under the Ly dynasty, when King Ly Thai Tong was still the crown prince, he was once leading the army to the front. Marching across Dong Co mountain (Dan Ne village, Thanh Hoa province), he saw in his dream the mountain deity, who asked to join the army in the fight against the enemy. Later after the victory, the King ordered for the building of a temple to worship the deity north of Thang Long citadel. Centuries later, under the Tay Son dynasty, Nguyen Quang Ban, a son of King Quang Trung, also built a temple in Dong Co mountain. In the Red River Delta, until recently, Thuong Lam and Ngoc Lu drums were still placed in communal houses and temples for worship. In Hanoi, the rite of taking the oath of loyalty to the nation and piety to ancestors is held every year at Dong Co temple, Thuy Khue street, Ba Dinh ward, demonstrating the sacredness and the respect among the Vietnamese community.

All of the above-mentioned points show that the bronze drum has always had an important position in the national culture and spiritual life, which brought to it great vitality throughout the nation's history.

3.2. *Ceramics*

In the ceramics production centres and ceramic industry, Dong Son traditional styles were still maintained in many centuries AD.

During the first ten centuries AD, there were two types of ceramics developed in parallel and influencing each other. One was the type of ceramics that continued the traditional characteristics of Dong Son

coarse ceramics. The other was the type of enameled ceramics that bear the Chinese ceramic style [4].

Before the penetration of Chinese products, ceramics had been made in Vietnam since as long as approx. 7,000 years ago. During the period of Dong Son culture, terracotta products were baked at the kiln temperature of approximately 1,000 degrees Celsius and had almost the same quality as glazed ones. Remarkably, there were "Duong Co" ceramic products with pink or mouldy-white colour and the pattern of coarse ropes crossing one another to make lozenges or squares; especially, they were solid like glazed terra-cotta products. As regards the materials and technique, the products were considerably more advanced than other types of ceramics created before. Besides hard ceramics, there were also products baked at a lower temperature, which were often porous and friable.

The tradition of Dong Son ceramics production was preserved in baked clay products. Coarse ceramic products continued the Dong Son traditions, bearing the materials, shapes and patterns, which were not only different from those of the Han-style ceramics but also improved a lot in comparison with the ceramics from the Dong Son period. In some well-known areas of kilns such as Tam Tho, Dong Dau, Thanh Lang and Duong Xa, etc., the Duong Co-style traditional hard ceramics grew quite popular.

During this period, baked clay products were quite diversified, including mainly utensils used in daily life. Local ceramic workers made not only Dong Son ceramic

products but also non-native ones. Ceramic products of the two types were made and used at the same time. Noticeably, the ceramics used commonly in China such as frankincense-burning vases, containers, three-legged statues, animal-deity statues and monsters with the looks of humans, etc. were not found in the excavated areas of kilns. Based on the prolonged tradition of ceramics production, Vietnamese ceramic workers quickly acquired Chinese technique, and then created new features for traditional ceramic products, which bore Vietnam's characteristics and identity.

From the technique perspective, Dong Son traditional ceramics were improved in terms of quality. Black-core coarse ceramics were still made and used together with black-core glazed products. Coarse ceramic products were thinner and harder; their durability and heat-resistance were also higher. Large ceramic containers of Duong Co style covered in red and mouldy-white colour were continually produced. Those products were used popularly by the people, "diluting" the sinicisation, on the one hand, and preserving the traditional characteristics of the ceramics of Dong Son civilisation on the other hand [15].

Another important aspect to be noticed is the Dong Son art shown in ceramics. When decorating ceramics of new types, ceramic workers in Giao Chi and Cuu Chan did not copy fully the Dong Son pattern composition, but only parts of it, or made some slight changes. For example, the pattern of stars on the tympanums of bronze drums were used to

decorate the cover of frankincense-burning vases (in grave No.1B in Bim Son), which was typical for Han-style artefacts. Or, the eight-pointed star in Co Loa tubular tiles reminds the image of the sun with its rays on the tympanums of bronze drums.

The patterns of Dong Son bronze artefacts such as the tangent circles, dotted circles, saw-teeth, comb-teeth and the S-shapes were also found on some Han-style ceramic artefacts and bricks used to build the graves dating back to the Han period in Mao Khe, Vung Dong, Nghi Ve, Thuan Thanh, Lang Ngam, Trang Kenh and Chem, etc.

While doing research on hard ceramics from the kiln in Duong Xa (the 9th and 10th centuries), some scholars said that the patterns on the hard ceramics tended to come back to the style and patterns in the period of Dong Son culture [6, p.79].

There were also new patterns used rarely during the Dong Son period. They include, for example, the pattern of a human face on the tiles, many of which were found in Luy Lau citadel and some in Co Loa citadel as well as the site of ceramic kilns in Tam Tho. The image of the human face was highly stylised by simple strokes; especially, all the faces were described with funny smiles. Many researchers have thus named them "clowns' faces". The characteristic is completely different from the pattern depicting the face of a ferocious man on the tiles in China. The pattern of human faces on the bricks found in Thap Nhan (Nghe Tinh, or the area of Nghe An and Ha Tinh provinces) depicts a cheerful and

lively smile, which was seemingly copied from the face of a chubby and friendly little baby. It is probable that, based on the pattern of the human face on the Chinese tiles, Viet ceramic workers created products of the same type but imbued them with the particular characteristics of the Vietnamese culture. Some argue that the ceramics, imbued deeply with the particular Vietnamese style, appeared only in the period of the domination.

During the period of Dai Viet under the Ly and Tran dynasties, the signals of Dong Son art were again found commonly in patterns on ceramic jars, plates, bowls and pots. For the ceramic artefacts dating back to the period of the Le and Mac dynasties, we can see some Dong Son traditional signals shown by the shapes and the patterns in various artefacts of ceramics and porcelains [2, pp.52-58].

3.3. *Some types of bronze artefacts*

In the burial graves and the cultural layer of habitation dating back to the period of the domination, especially under the Eastern Han dynasty, archaeologists often found bronze artefacts that bore both the Dong Son and the Han cultural styles. In this part of the paper, we would like to make the description of some of them. To some extent, the artefacts reveal the great vitality of Dong Son culture in the period of the domination.

3.3.1. Drum basins

Called “*chậu trống*” in Vietnamese, they are also named “*trống chậu*” by some

people. Statistics has not been available so far of the artefacts. According to our research findings, however, over 30 drum basins are now kept in the central- and provincial-level museums, mainly in Thanh Hoa, Quang Ninh and Hanoi. A common characteristic the artefacts share is that the outside of the basin bottom is decorated with the patterns often found on the tympana of late Dong Son bronze drums, such as a solar pattern with many rays in the centre surrounded by the outer bands of flying birds and stylised feathered men with flags. Yet, the inner surface of the basin bottom is decorated with a pair of fish facing each other. This is a typical pattern of the Han culture. Obviously, the type of artefact bears both the Han and Dong Son cultural characteristics. The drum basin unearthed in a grave dating back to the period of the Eastern Han dynasty in Da Bac (Van Don district, Quang Ninh province) has two Han-style tiger-face designs on the outside near the mouth [13, p.108]. More than 20 such basins are now kept in the Vietnam National Museum of History. For the jar coded Lsb-31260, the bottom is decorated with a band of the Lac (Vietnamese: *Lạc*) birds (also translated as Annam birds), resembling the pattern on Ngoc Lu bronze drums. This shows the extensive influence of Dong Son civilisation on the Han culture, which is revealed by the basins buried together with the Han people occupying Vietnam.

3.3.2. Dong Son bronze jar with the Han cultural designs

Dong Son bronze jars were originated purely in Vietnam, but their design

composition changed slightly during the first centuries AD. The two Dong Son-style bronze jars that were on display in Ha Tay Museum (Ha Tay was a province, which was merged into Hanoi in 2008) had Han cultural designs.

The first one is a lidded jar with a cylindrical body and a flat bottom. It is 34 cm high, with the mouth of a 30-cm diameter and the bottom of a 26-cm diameter. As regards the shape and the patterns, it is a standard Dong Son-style jar with strips of designs running around the body, including tangent circles, comb-teeth and palindromes. However, the pair of handles placed near the mouth do not have an upside-down U shape, but replaced by a pair of handles with the designs of tiger faces with rings, which is very typical for the Han cultural style.

The second one is a lidless jar with a smaller size. Its body is decorated with Dong Son particular patterns, but there are three short curved legs under the bottom and a pair of such tiger-face designs near the mouth like in the first jar.

3.3.3. Baluster-shaped bronze vases

There are very few such artefacts available at present. They are bronze products of the Han cultural style, but decorated with the Dong Son-style patterns. In the book titled *Bronze Objects of Dong Son Culture*, Hoang Xuan Chinh introduces some baluster-shaped bronze vases exhibited in Hanoi Museum and Thanh Hoa Museum. The vases have vertical and flat mouths, long necks, round bellies which resemble spheres, and

long and curved feet surrounded by brims with triangular or unidentified shaped holes. They have tight lids. As regards the shape, the vases are very similar to those under the Han dynasty, which are called “*hu*” in Chinese. Yet, they have a pair of upside-down U-shaped handles in the shoulder. The neck and body are decorated with strips of the patterns of tangent circles, triangles and S-palindromes whirling into a circle at the end. They represent the particular “artistic language” of Dong Son bronze artefacts [5, pp.120-121].

4. Conclusion

The vitality of Dong Son culture against the sinicisation throughout the first ten centuries AD reflects the struggle of Viet people shown via the insurrections led by the Trung sisters, Lady Trieu, Ly Bi, Phung Hung, and eventually, the victory of the Vietnamese under the leadership of Ngo Quyen against the Southern Han, which ushered in a new era of national independence - the era of Dai Viet culture and civilisation accompanied by the marvellous renaissance of the vitality of Dong Son, which is the origin of the Vietnamese culture.

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